

The following blog entry was published by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) regarding the recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS). If you attend any of the following school, you may be impacted by the DOE decision:

ACICS Schools Approved for GI Bill® Benefits in Virginia
American College of Commerce and Technology
American National University - Salem
American National University - Martinsville
American National University - Lynchburg
American National University - Harrisonburg
American National University - Danville
American National University - Charlottesville
Bon Secours Memorial College of Nursing
Columbia College
Everest College - Woodbridge
Everest College - Chesapeake
Fortis College - Richmond
Fortis College - Norfolk
Global Health College
ITT Technical Institute - Norfolk
ITT Technical Institute - Richmond
ITT Technical Institute - Springfield
ITT Technical Institute - Chantilly
ITT Technical Institute - Salem
Miller-Motte Technical College - Lynchburg
Miller-Motte Technical College - Roanoke
Sentara College of Health Sciences
Stratford University - Falls Church
Stratford University - Woodbridge
Stratford University - Newport News
Stratford University - Alexandria Campus
Stratford University - Glen Allen
Stratford University - Virginia Beach
Virginia College - Richmond

The Virginia SAA is posting this blog entry to our website for your information. You can find the original blog entry here: <http://blog.ed.gov/2016/06/college-accreditation-changes-mean-students/>

What College Accreditation Changes Mean for Students

Editor's note (6/24/16): Yesterday, NACIQI – the independent board that advises the Department of Education on accreditation – voted 10-3 in support of the Department's recommendation to end recognition of [ACICS](#). As noted in the post below, that was the next step in the process after the initial recommendation for Department staff. The recommendations now come to a senior official here at the Department, who has 90 days to make a decision. After that, ACICS will have the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Secretary of Education if it wishes to do so.

For millions of Americans, federal student loans and grants open the doors to a college education. That critical federal aid must be used at a school that is (among other things) given the seal of approval by an “accrediting agency” or “accreditor” recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. It's one of the safeguards in the system. Accreditation is an important signal to students, families, and the Department about whether a school offers a quality education. Accreditors have a responsibility under federal law to make sure colleges earn that seal.

But what happens when the Department stops recognizing an accrediting agency?

It's a relatively unusual case, but it's a relevant one today. As part of our [regular process for reviewing accreditors](#) – staff at the Department recommended that the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (or ACICS) should no longer be recognized by the Department as an agency that can provide schools with an accreditation that makes them eligible for participation in federal aid. For more information on the failures that led to that recommendation [click here](#).

This is not the final word on ACICS – so nothing is inevitable or happens immediately – but this recommendation does kick off a process that students will want to know more about.

I'll try to answer some of what you might be wondering today – and we'll continue to provide more information as the process plays out.

How do I know if my school is accredited by ACICS?

Good first question. [You can look it up here](#).

What does this mean for students at ACICS-accredited institutions?

First – don't panic. As I said, this is just an initial recommendation. Nothing happens inevitably or immediately.

The chain of events that plays out next will take – at minimum – more than 18 months. That means that many of the students who already have started at one of these schools will be able to complete their certificates or degrees before there is a chance of anything changing.

Generally speaking, if you're near the end of your program or you're preparing to transfer to another college or university, this news probably won't interrupt your program.

Maybe it would be helpful if I explain...

What happens next?

The actual decision will be made by a senior official here at the Department. That senior official will consider the staff recommendation released today along with another recommendation by an independent board called the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (or NACIQI) that advises the Department on these issues.

NACIQI meets next week to form its own recommendation.

Once the deciding official has received both recommendations, she has 90 days to review them before making a decision on whether or not to recognize the agency. After that, if ACICS disagrees with the decision, the agency has 30 days to appeal to the Secretary of Education.

What if the Department ultimately decides to end its recognition of ACICS?

If the deciding official (or the Secretary, if there's an appeal) ultimately decides to stop recognizing ACICS, schools that it has accredited will have 18 months to get a seal of approval from a different recognized accreditor in order to stay eligible for federal student aid. That's why I said earlier that it will take at least 18 months for this chain of events to play out before there's any impact on your aid.

Of course, individual circumstances vary greatly. If you're wondering whether changes in your school's accreditation status might affect your specific plans, you should reach out to your school for individualized advice.

It's worth noting here that licensing for some jobs – but not all – may require that your program is currently accredited by a Department-recognized accreditor. Contact your institution or the licensure board in your field to see if this is the case.

Remember, even if ACICS ultimately loses its recognition, schools will have a chance to find a different accreditor for their programs.

Okay, so it will take a while, but what if a school ultimately can't find an accreditor?

At that point, students would no longer be able to use their federal aid at those schools. Students who want to continue their education using federal loans or grants past that point would need to transfer. Schools also need to have a plan in place to inform students about their options so students are not left scrambling.

What if I want to transfer out of my school?

That's a decision only you can make, but we have some tools that can help if you decide to transfer. In particular, you might want to check out the [College Scorecard](#) to look into other options and see how well those schools prepare their graduates for life after college.

Again, circumstances will be unique to each student and each school, but you may be able to transfer your credits. You'll want to check with the new school's registrars.

I just started a program at an ACICS-accredited school. What should I do?

If you're just getting started, you might be affected if ACICS loses its recognition, especially if your program will take longer than 18 months from the time a final decision is made.

You may want to be in touch with your school to make sure they have a solid plan to pursue accreditation with a different accreditor.

You might also want to do a little research using the [College Scorecard](#). There, you can make sure your school has a track record of preparing its students for successful careers. You can also compare other options if you're interested in transferring.

I already graduated from an ACICS-accredited school. Is my degree compromised?

Nobody can take away the hard work you put in or the skills you gained. Your school was accredited when you earned your degree, and you'll never have to return your certificate or diploma.

Remember, even if ACICS ultimately loses its recognition, schools will have a chance to find a different accreditor for their programs.

Now what?

First, a reminder: Don't freak out. Nothing is final today, so you've got some time. If a school's accreditor loses its recognition, the school should be in touch immediately with students and share information about their options. And the Department will monitor to make sure that happens and regularly post updates through [studentaid.gov](#).

Whatever you choose to do, please know this: you have a wealth of options in pursuing your education, so don't stop. Getting a high-quality degree or credential in a field where employers are hiring is still the surest way to provide for your future economic security.

For our part, we'll keep working to protect America's students and support them as they work to complete their degree or credential.

Thanks for all the info, but I still want to know more.

You got it. Here's a more detailed set of [questions and answers](#).

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